

February 22, 2008

**Public Notice for Water Quality Certification and/or Waste  
Discharge Requirements (Dredge/Fill Projects)**

California Department of Transportation – Sandhouse Passing Lane and Sandhouse  
Snow Chain On and Off Area, Route 299  
WDID No. 1A07141WNTR

Trinity County

On August 24, 2007, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) received an application from the California Department of Transportation (applicant) requesting Federal Clean Water Act, section 401, Water Quality Certification for activities related to the construction of a passing lane, chain off area, chain on area, and road width improvements on Route 299, Trinity County, near Buckhorn Summit, between Post Miles 69.5 and 70.5. The proposed project will cause disturbances to waters of the United States associated with Grass Valley Creek in the Douglas City Hydrologic Subarea No. 106.31.

The proposed project is located approximately 2.9 miles west of Buckhorn Summit and 18 miles East of Weaverville (40.658394N/122.767653W and 40.651072N/122.746956W). The project area has steep hillsides, and includes an old wagon road and logging roads, as well as Highway 299. An unnamed drainage located on the north side of the road drains through highway underdrains to Little Grass Valley Creek on the south side of the road. Little Grass Valley Creek is located outside of the proposed project impact area; the creek flows westward to its confluence with Grass Valley Creek, approximately two miles away.

The purpose of the proposed project is to increase safety for vehicles while passing and to bring the width up to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) design standards. The proposed project involves a 35 foot increase in the width of the existing westbound lane edge (north side of road) to provide for: 1) a westbound passing lane, 2) an illuminated chain off area adjacent to westbound passing lane, 3) an illuminated chain on area adjacent to the eastbound passing lane, 4) 8-foot shoulders at the edge of each lane, 5) a 30 foot clear recovery zone adjacent to the westbound edge of traveled way, 6) extension of four culverts on north side of highway, 7) downdrain replacement/removal on the south side of the highway, and 8) installation of guardrail and signage upgrades. The applicant proposes to use the State-owned Buckhorn Sand House property, and three turnouts at or near Post Miles 69.4, 70.53, and 70.56 for construction access and storage/staging areas.

The applicant proposes to widen the westbound lane to accommodate a 12 foot passing lane, a 4 foot shoulder and a 4 foot median. In addition, the applicant proposes to cut back the slopes adjacent to the eastbound side of the road, and to use the material to prepare the sub-base adjacent to the westbound side for the road widening activities.

**California Environmental Protection Agency**

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The applicant also proposes to install 12 light poles, and to construct a trench from the Sandhouse, running approximately 1000 feet along the westbound edge of the highway, crossing under the highway, and running for approximately 1500 feet along the eastbound edge of the highway, in order to install electrical conduit for lighting in the chain on/off areas.

The applicant proposes to lengthen four existing culverts to accommodate the widened road; culvert extension will involve trenching in line with the existing culverts, upstream of the inlet ends, adjoining extensions to the existing culverts, and backfilling with clean fill over and around each extension. The applicant will conduct all culvert extension activities during the dry season. The applicant proposes to install or replace five culvert down drains on the south side of Highway 299, using hand labor and equipment operated from the existing road surface.

The applicant proposes to remove 2.51 acres of forest vegetation on the north side of the highway consisting of second growth Douglas-fir, approximately 100 trees that range in diameter at breast height (dbh) from 9 inches up to 79 inches with the mean range from 13 to 24 inch dbh. Vegetation removal will occur at a time to avoid impacts to nesting birds. The applicant proposes compensatory mitigation for Northern Spotted Owl (NSO) habitat at a 2:1 ratio for loss of 2.51 acres of foraging and dispersal habitat. The United State Fish and Wildlife Service consultation determined that no designated or proposed NSO Critical Habitat will be affected by the project. The mitigation for this impact involves habitat improvement to 5.02 acres for the Trinity Resource Conservation District.

The project environmental study limit is approximately 17.40 acres. The proposed project will result in 108.45 square feet (.00249 acre) and 148.21 linear feet of permanent impacts to the streambank. The impacts will occur in three ephemeral channels and one perennial stream. Compensatory mitigation includes 3:1 mitigation for riparian vegetation removal and a 5 year monitoring plan to achieve a minimum of 80% success criteria. The applicant has submitted a Mitigation and Monitoring Plan (MMP). Mitigation involves planting willows in a 55 foot by 6 foot area behind the Caltrans-owned Sandhouse, which is located within the project limits. Non compensatory mitigation for this project includes the use of Best Management Practices for sediment and turbidity control and for heavy equipment operation near a waterway. The proposed project is scheduled to occur during the construction season of 2008 or 2009; the applicant anticipates completing the project in one construction season. The proposed project does not involve any work within an active flowing channel.

The applicant has applied for authorization from the United States Army Corps of Engineers to perform the project under Nationwide Permit Number 14, *Linear Transportation Projects*, pursuant to Clean Water Act, section 404. The applicant has applied for a Lake or Streambed Alteration Agreement from the California Department of Fish and Game. The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), as lead California Environmental Quality Act agency, has prepared an Initial Study for this project. Pending the close of the public review period, on March 11, 2008, Caltrans

plans to adopt a mitigated negative declaration (SCH No. 2008022049) for the project in order to comply with CEQA. The Regional Water board has considered the CEQA document and any proposed changes incorporated into the project or required as a condition of approval to avoid significant effects to the environment.

The applicant requested that the United States Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS) provide an informal consultation, pursuant to the Section 7 of the Federal Endangered Species Act. USFWS conducted an informal consultation and issued a letter of concurrence March 22, 2007, stating that the project is not likely to adversely affect the Northern spotted owl.

The information contained in this public notice is only a summary of the proposed project. The application for Water Quality Certification in the Regional Water Board's file contains additional details about the proposed project, including maps and design drawings. The application and Regional Water Board file are available for public review.

Regional Water Board staff are proposing to regulate this project pursuant to Section 401 of the Clean Water Act (33 USC 1341) and/or Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act authority pending completion of further CEQA review. In addition, staff will consider all comments submitted in writing and received at this office by mail during a 21-day comment period that begins on the first date of issuance of this letter and ends at 5:00 p.m. on the last day of the comment period. If you have any questions, please contact Diana Henriouille at (707) 576-2350 within 21 days of the posting of this notice.

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